Sand Creek Massacre Project

Special Resource Study/Environmental Assessment

History of the Sand Creek Massacre

At dawn on November 29, 1864, approximately 700 U.S. volunteer soldiers commanded by Colonel John M. Chivington attacked a village of about 500 Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians along Sand Creek – also known as Big Sandy Creek – in southeastern Colorado Territory. Using small arms and howitzer fire, the troops drove the people out of their camp. While many managed to escape the initial onslaught, others, particularly noncombatant women, children, and the elderly fled into and up the bottom of the dry streambed. The soldiers followed, shooting at them as they struggled through the sandy earth. At a point several hundred yards above the village, the people frantically excavated pits and trenches along either side of the streambed to protect themselves. Some attempted to fight back with whatever weapons they had managed to retrieve from the camp, and at several places along Sand Creek the soldiers shot the people from opposite banks and presently brought forward the howitzers to blast them from their scant defenses. Over the course of seven hours the troops succeeded in killing at least 150 Cheyennes and Arapahos composed mostly of the old, the young, and the weak. During the afternoon and following day, the soldiers wandered over the field committing atrocities on the dead before departing the scene on December 1 to resume campaigning.

Since the day it happened, the Sand Creek Massacre has maintained its station as one of the most emotionally charged and controversial events in American history, a seemingly senseless frontier tragedy reflective of its time and place. The background of Sand Creek lay in a whirlwind of events and issues registered by the ongoing Civil War in the East and West, the overreactions by whites on the frontier to the 1862-63 Dakota uprising in Minnesota and its aftermath, the status of the various bands of Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians *vis-a-vis* each other as well as other plains tribes, the constant undercurrent of threatened Confederate incursions, along with the existing state of politics in Colorado and the self-aggrandizing machinations of individual politicians in that territory. Perhaps most important, the seeds of Sand Creek lay in the presence of two historically discordant cultures within a geographical area that both coveted for disparate reasons, a situation designed to insure conflict.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

Throughout the first years of the Civil War, Colorado officials brooded over possible secessionist tendencies of the territory's populace, and apprehensions arose over Confederate influences in Texas, the Indian Territory, and New Mexico potentially spilling across the boundaries to disrupt Colorado's relations with its native inhabitants. In Colorado Territory, reports of the Minnesota Indian conflict fostered an atmosphere of fear and suspicion that, however unjustified, contributed to the war with the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians in 1864-65. During 1862 and 1863, most area depredations involved not warriors from these tribes, but Shoshonis and Utes whose repeated raids

on emigrant and mail routes south and west of Fort Laramie (in present southeastern Wyoming) disrupted traffic and threatened the course of settlement. Aggressive campaigning in 1863 by columns of California and Kansas troops, including the massacre of a village of Shoshonis at Bear River in present Idaho by a force commanded by Colonel Patrick E. Connor, abruptly ended these tribes' forays. Meanwhile, on the plains east of the Rocky Mountains, Indian troubles were mostly confined to bands of Kiowas, Kiowa-Apaches, Arapahos, and occasionally Comanches, who stopped wagon trains bound over the Santa Fe Trail; elsewhere, the Lakotas and Pawnees maintained traditional conflicts with each other, encounters with but incidental impact on regional white settlement.[1]

CHEYENNES AND ARAPAHOS

Of all the plains tribes, the Cheyennes and Arapahos appear to have been the least offensive to white settlers at this particular time. Both tribes had been in the region for decades. The Cheyennes, Algonkian-speaking people whose agriculturalist forbears migrated from the area of the western Great Lakes, had occupied the buffalo prairies east of the Missouri River by the late seventeenth century. With the acquisition of horses their migration proceeded, and over the next few decades the Cheyennes ventured beyond the Black Hills as far north as the Yellowstone River and south to below the Platte. By the first part of the nineteenth century, the tribe had separated into northern and southern bodies that still maintained strong band and family relationships. In the conflicts that followed over competition for lands and game resources, the Cheyennes became noted fighters who forged strong intertribal alliances with the Lakotas and the Arapahos. The Arapahos, Algonkian speakers possibly from the area of northern Minnesota, had located west of the Missouri River by at least the late 1700s and probably very much earlier, and by the early nineteenth century were variously established in what is now Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Colorado. Their alliance with the Cheyennes extended back to the Cheyennes' entrance onto the eastern prairies, when both were semisedentary peoples, and was grounded in mutual enmity (at that time) toward the Lakotas' growing regional domination as well as intertribal trade considerations. (Like the Cheyennes, in time the Arapahos gravitated into northern and southern regional divisions, with the southern group eventually coalescing in the area that included south-central Colorado.) Despite occasional Cheyenne-Arapaho rifts, mutual warfare with surrounding groups during the early 1800s solidified their bond and presently included the Lakotas; together, the three tribes variously fought warriors of the Kiowas and Crows, and in the central plains Arapaho and Cheyenne warriors drove the Kiowas and Comanches south of the Arkansas River. A relatively small tribe, the Arapahos were driven by circumstances to become

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[1]Robert M. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848-1865* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), pp. 281-83; Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *The Civil War in the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), pp. 292-94; Elliott West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), p. 287. The most definitive presentation of the events leading to Sand Creek appears in Gary L. Roberts, "Sand Creek: Tragedy and Symbol" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, dated 1984, University of Oklahoma, Norman), chapters 2 through 8.

resourceful in the face of intertribal conflicts and the potential adversity wrought by the presence of Anglo-Americans.[2]

TREATY OF FORT WISE

In 1851 the Cheyennes and Arapahos subscribed to the Treaty of Fort Laramie, which assigned them land lying between the North Platte River on the north and the Arkansas River on the south running from the area of the Smoky Hill River west to the Rocky Mountains. By the late 1850s the southern divisions of both tribes ranged through central Kansas and eastern Colorado as they pursued their hunting and warring routine with enemy tribes, and for the most part ignored the gradual inroads of whites into their country. In 1857 the Southern Cheyennes experienced a confrontation with troops at Solomon's Fork, Kansas,[3] and their subsequent attitude toward whites had become one of tolerance and avoidance. During the Colorado gold rush and the concomitant movement by whites into and through the territory, most of the Cheyennes and Arapahos remained peaceable, and peace factions headed by Black Kettle and White Antelope of the Cheyennes and Little Raven of the Arapahos sought to continue that status. But the tide of emigration associated with the gold rush, particularly along the Platte and Arkansas valleys, led government authorities to impose new strictures on the people.

In 1861, these chiefs touched pen to the Treaty of Fort Wise, a document that surrendered most of the Indian territories as previously acknowledged by the Fort Laramie Treaty and granted them instead a triangular-shaped tract along and north of the upper Arkansas River in eastern Colorado, where they would henceforth receive government annuities and learn to till the land. The accord, however, did not include the consent of all Cheyennes and Arapahos living in the Platte country, and those leaders who signed drew enduring resentment from the northerners who were resisting such changes. Many of the affected people, including the band of Southern Cheyenne Dog Soldiers who repudiated the concept of any territorially confining pact, continued their

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[2]For Cheyenne history and culture, see, Peter J. Powell, *Sweet Medicine: The Continuing Role of the Sacred Arrows, the Sun Dance, and the Sacred Buffalo Hat in Northern Cheyenne History* (2 vols.; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969); John H. Moore, *The Cheyenne* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1996); John H. Moore, *The Cheyenne Nation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987); Donald J. Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963); George Bird Grinnell, *The Cheyenne Indians* (2 vols.; New York: Cooper Square, 1923); John Stands In Timber and Margot Liberty, *Cheyenne Memories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); and Peter J. Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain: A History of the Northern Cheyenne Chiefs and Warrior Societies, 1830-1879, with an Epilogue, 1969-1974* (2 vols.; San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981). For the Arapahos, see Virginia Cole Trenholm, *The Arapahoes, Our People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970); John R. Swanton, *The Indian Tribes of North America* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971), pp. 384-86; and Loretta Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics, 1851-1978* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982).

[3]For the Solomon's Fork encounter, see William Y. Chalfant, *Cheyennes and Horse Soldiers: The 1857 Expedition and the Battle of Solomon's Fork* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989).

age-old pursuits in the buffalo country, and refused to move onto the new reservation. Similarly, the Kiowas and Comanches, to the south, remained disinclined to participate in the treaty.[4]

The immediate circumstances leading to Sand Creek grew out of the Treaty of Fort Wise and the desire of Colorado Territorial Governor John Evans to seek total adherence to it by all of the Cheyennes and Arapahos. Within the atmosphere prevailing in the wake of the Minnesota outbreak, Evans, an ambitious visionary, became committed to eliminating all Indians from the plains so that Euro-American travel and settlement could proceed safely and without interruption; he was also interested in seeing the transcontinental railroad reach Denver and wanted eastern Colorado free of tribesmen to facilitate that development. Adding to this, Evans and others feared that the tribes might somehow be influenced by the Confederate cause, to include being drawn into a plan to cut communications between the East and California by seizing posts in the Platte and Arkansas valleys. Concentrated on the Upper Arkansas Reservation, the Indians might not only be better controlled, but would be altogether cleared from roads used by miners and settlers, and to this end Evans invited the tribal leadership to attend a council scheduled for September 1863 on the plains east of Denver.

The Cheyennes and Arapahos were clearly not interested, however, and none appeared to negotiate; most regarded the treaty as a swindle and refused to subject themselves to living on the new reserve. They, moreover, believed the area devoid of buffalo, whereas the plains of central Kansas still afforded plentiful herds. Coincidentally, at Fort Larned, Kansas, a Cheyenne man was killed in an incident that fueled considerable controversy among the Indians and resolved them even further against more treaties. Governor Evans took the refusal to assemble as a sign that the tribes were planning war; he used the rebuff, along with rumored incitations of area tribes by northern Sioux, to promote the notion to federal officials that hostilities in his territory were imminent. Although Evans may have sincerely believed that his territory was in grave danger, it has been suggested that he lobbied to create a situation that would permit him to forcibly remove the tribesmen from all settled areas of Colorado.[5]

GOVERNOR EVANS, COLONEL CHIVINGTON, AND THE PLAINS WAR OF 1864

Evans's accomplice in the evolving scenario was Colonel John M. Chivington, a former Methodist minister who had garnered significant victories against Confederate troops at Apache Canyon and Glorieta Pass in New Mexico. Nicknamed "The Fighting Parson," Chivington governed the Military District of Colorado within the Department of the

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[4]Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes*, pp. 148-52; Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, pp. 283-84; George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 120; Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), pp. 12-17; David F. Halaas, "'All the Camp was Weeping': George Bent and the Sand Creek Massacre," *Colorado Heritage* (Summer, 1995), p. 7.

[5]Roberts, "Sand Creek," pp. 76-108; Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, p. 284; Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, pp. 121-29; Josephy, *Civil War in the American West*, pp. 295, 297-98; Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes*, pp. 155, 158-61, 166-69.

Missouri, whose commanders were often preoccupied with operations elsewhere, thus affording him an opportunity to play out his military and political fortunes on the Colorado frontier. In January 1864, reorganization of the military hierarchy placed Chivington's district under Major General Samuel R. Curtis's Department of Kansas, a jurisdiction that remained considerably immersed in campaigns against Confederates in eastern Kansas and the Indian Territory, thus leaving Chivington to pursue his interests with total independence. As the war proceeded in the East, however, both Chivington and Evans grew alarmed at seeing territorial troops increasingly diverted to help fight Confederate forces in Missouri and Kansas. Evans lobbied for their return, and requested that regulars be sent to guard the crucial supply and communication links along the Platte and Arkansas valleys. Facing widespread manpower deficits in the East, Washington initially rejected his appeals.[6]

Chivington endorsed Evans's notion that the Indians in his territory were ready for war, even though evidence indicates that, despite the transgressions of a few warriors, the tribesmen believed they were at peace. In April 1864, however, when livestock, possibly strayed from ranches in the Denver and South Platte River areas, turned up in the hands of Cheyenne Dog Soldiers, Evans and Chivington interpreted it as provocation for the inception of conflict. In response, troops of the First Colorado Cavalry skirmished with those Indians at Fremont's Orchard along the South Platte River. Acting on Chivington's orders to "kill Cheyennes wherever and whenever found," soldiers during the following month assaulted numerous innocent Cheyenne camps, driving out the people and destroying their property, and in one instance killed a peace chief named Starving Bear, who had earlier headed a delegation that met with President Abraham Lincoln in Washington. In retaliation, parties of warriors mounted raids along the roads in Kansas, especially between Forts Riley and Larned, but refrained from all-out conflict. Attempting to stem the trouble, Curtis's inspector-general advised against further Chivington-like forays and instead counseled conciliation with the Cheyennes and protection of the travel routes. He complained that the Colorado men did "not know one tribe from another and . . . will kill anything in the shape of an Indian."

But it was too late. Following the murders of several more of their people, the Cheyennes escalated their raiding, and their camps soon swelled with stolen goods. Marauding warriors from among the Arapahos, Kiowas, and Lakotas, often minus the endorsement of their chiefs, opened attacks on white enterprises along the trails bordering the Platte, Smoky Hill, and Arkansas rivers in Nebraska and Kansas, killing more than thirty people and capturing several women and children. In Colorado, warriors attacked and murdered an entire family, the Hungates, on Box Elder Creek but thirty miles from Denver; public display of their bodies, coupled with fearful pronouncements from Governor Evans's office, drove most citizens from isolated ranches and communities to seek protection in Denver. In one panicked missive to the War Department, Governor Evans called for 10,000 troops. "Unless they can be sent at once," he intoned, "we will be cut off and destroyed." Although the Cheyennes received blame for the Hungate tragedy, Arapahos later confessed to the deed.[7]

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[6]Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, pp. 284-85; Josephy, *Civil War in the American West*, p. 299.

[7]Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, pp. 285-87; Halaas, "George Bent and the Sand Creek Massacre," p. 7; Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes*, pp. 176-91; Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre*, pp. 36-90; West, *Contested Plains*, pp. 289-91; Grinnell, *The*

Responding to the crisis, in July and August 1864, General Curtis directed several columns of troops to scour the country west, north, and south of Fort Larned. While the campaign brought meager results, it succeeded in opening the traffic route west along the Arkansas because of increased garrisons at the Kansas and Colorado posts. Curtis now strengthened his administration of the area by establishing a single district, the District of the Upper Arkansas, commanded by Major General James G. Blunt, to replace those that had previously monitored Indian conditions. Similar administrative changes were made in Nebraska. There, in August, Cheyennes attacked homes along the Little Blue River, killing 15 settlers and carrying off others. In response, Curtis mounted a strong campaign of Nebraska and Kansas troops to search through western Kansas, but the soldiers found no Indians. Similarly, in September General Blunt led an expedition out of Fort Larned in south-central Kansas, eventually heading north seeking Cheyennes reported in the area. On September 25, two companies of Colorado troops under Major Scott J. Anthony encountered a large village of Cheyennes and Arapahos on Walnut Creek and engaged them, fighting desperately until Blunt arrived with support. The command pursued the Indians for two days, then withdrew from the field.[8]

PEACE INITIATIVES

Following these operations, Blunt and Curtis became distracted from the Indian situation by a sudden Confederate incursion into Missouri that demanded their immediate attention. The diversion permitted Colonel Chivington to step forward, just at a time when the Cheyennes, Arapahos, and other tribes began slackening the war effort in preparation for the winter season. Buffalo hunting now superseded all else, and Cheyenne leaders like Black Kettle, who had previously urged peace, regained influence. Black Kettle learned of a proclamation issued by Governor Evans calling upon all "Friendly Indians of the Plains" to divorce themselves from the warring factions and to isolate their camps near military posts to insure their protection. Those who did not thus surrender would henceforth be considered hostile. In late August, the chief notified Major Edward W. Wynkoop, commander at Fort Lyon, on the Arkansas River near present Lamar, Colorado, of his desire for peace. Following up, Wynkoop led his command of First Colorado Cavalry out to meet Black Kettle and the Arapaho leader, Left Hand, at the big timbers of the Smoky Hill River, near Fort Wallace, Kansas. At the council, the Cheyennes and Arapahos turned over several captive whites and consented to meet with Evans and Chivington in Denver to reach an accord. Then Black Kettle and the other leaders followed Wynkoop back to Fort Lyon.

When Black Kettle and six headmen arrived in Denver, the city was in turmoil because of the conditions wrought by the Indian conflict. Incoming supplies of food and merchandise had been stopped by the warfare, and the citizenry was still shaken by the

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Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 131-42. The quotes are cited in Josephy, *Civil War in the American West*, pp. 300, 303.

[8]Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre*, pp. 91-97; Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, pp. 287-89; Josephy, *Civil War in the American West*, pp. 301-04; Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes*, pp. 193-208; Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, pp. 155-58. For a participant's view of these broad operations, see Eugene F. Ware, *The Indian War of 1864* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960).

Hungate murders. Furthermore, in August, the governor had published a proclamation contradicting his earlier one and that called upon citizens to kill all Indians and seize their property, effectively extending an invitation for wholesale bloodshed and thievery. Evans had meantime received from federal authorities permission to raise a regiment of 100-day United States volunteers, to be designated the Third Colorado Cavalry, and Chivington was preparing it for field service. All of these developments made Evans's earlier pronouncements ring hollow, especially with many of the territory's citizens clamoring for vengeance. Moreover, the governor needed to back up his earlier war predictions with Washington officials and clear up questions regarding the status of Indian lands in Colorado. And if the tribes went unpunished, he believed it would likely only encourage them to renew the warfare next year.[9]

At the council at Camp Weld near Denver on September 28, 1864, Evans spoke evasively to the chiefs, informing Black Kettle that, although his people might still separate themselves from their warring kin, they must make their peace with the military authorities, in essence turning the situation over to Chivington. Anxious for peace, Black Kettle and his entourage acceded to all conditions and Chivington told them that they could report to Fort Lyon once they had laid down their arms. But the Camp Weld meeting was fraught with "deadly ambiguities." The Indians departed the proceedings convinced that since they had already been to the post they had made peace, although neither Evans nor Chivington admitted that such was the case. Further, a telegram from General Curtis admonished that "I want no peace until the Indians suffer more . . . [and only upon] my directions." Evans notified Washington authorities of the continued hostility of the tribesmen and of the need to deal with them by force of arms, noting that "the winter . . . is the most favorable time for their chastisement." Yet, in consequence of the Camp Weld meeting, Black Kettle prepared his people to accept the conditions and surrender themselves as prisoners of war.[10]

First to arrive in late October at Fort Lyon were 113 lodges of Arapahos under Little Raven and Left Hand. Because as prisoners the Arapahos could not hunt, Major Wynkoop issued rations to the destitute people while assuring them of their safety. But Wynkoop's action directly countered General Curtis's policy of punishing the tribes, and when word of his charity reached district headquarters at Fort Riley tempers flared. Wynkoop was summarily called there to explain his actions. At Fort Lyon, Major Scott Anthony, of Chivington's First Colorado Cavalry, replaced him. On arrival at Fort Lyon in early November, Anthony refused the Arapahos further provisions and temporarily disarmed them. When Black Kettle reached the fort he reported that his lodges were pitched some forty miles away on Sand Creek, a location that Anthony approved because he had no rations to feed the Cheyennes. The major told them that he was seeking authority to feed them at Fort Lyon. Major Wynkoop, who the Indians trusted,

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[9]Hoig, *Sand Creek Massacre*, pp. 98-107; Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, pp. 290-91; Halaas, "George Bent and the Sand Creek Massacre," pp. 7-9; Josephy, *Civil War in the American West*, pp. 305-06; West, *Contested Plains*, p. 291; Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, pp. 152-53.

[10]Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes*, pp. 210-13; Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, p. 291; Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre*, pp. 110-28; Josephy, *Civil War in the American West*, pp. 306-07 (Quotes are in ibid., p. 307); West, *Contested Plains*, p. 295; Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, pp. 153-54.

had given them assurances of Anthony's integrity, and the Cheyenne leaders had accepted these conditions prior to Wynkoop's departure from Fort Lyon on November 26. Advised to join Black Kettle's people on Sand Creek, only the Arapaho leader, Left Hand, complied and started his few lodges in that direction; Little Raven took his followers far away down the Arkansas.

MILITARY PREPARATIONS

While all of this proceeded, Colonel Chivington orchestrated events in Denver that would climax in the confrontation with the Cheyennes and Arapahos on Sand Creek. Following a failed statehood vote, in which he was defeated as a candidate for Congress, Chivington directed his efforts to readying the new regiment, locally castigated as the "Bloodless Third" because its members had yet to kill a single Indian, and which was soon to close out its 100-day enlistment. Composed of but partly trained officers and undisciplined men from the local community, the Third Colorado Cavalry had been organized by Colonel George L. Shoup, who had previously served under Chivington. Earlier that fall, Chivington had envisioned attacking bands of Cheyennes reported in the Republican River country, but by November (and perhaps secretly all along) he targeted Black Kettle and his people; his every movement appeared calculated to that end, for the tribesmen technically were not at peace and were awaiting Curtis's consent before moving to Fort Lyon. In October, in this tense atmosphere, Colonel Chivington armed his command and, with Shoup commanding the regiment, started companies south to assemble at Bijou Basin, 60 miles southeast of Denver.[11]

On November 14, Chivington himself marched out of Denver with companies of the Third and First Colorado Cavalry regiments headed toward the Arkansas River. The weather turned foul, and the movement was beset with drifting snows that delayed units from rendezvousing at Camp Fillmore, near Pueblo. On the 23rd, Chivington inspected the united command, then all proceeded east along the Arkansas. The troops reached Fort Lyon at midday, November 28. Chivington had traveled quickly and quietly and his approach surprised the garrison. To secure knowledge of his presence and movements, the colonel placed a cordon of pickets around the fort and refused to allow anybody to leave. At Fort Lyon, Major Anthony greeted Chivington and, apprised of his mission to find and destroy Black Kettle's camp as prelude to striking the Smoky Hill villages, gave his wholehearted support to the extent of providing additional troops and offering guidance to the village. Some officers protested that Black Kettle's people were *de facto* prisoners of the government, awaiting only General Curtis's permission before they should arrive at the post, and that to strike them would violate promises made earlier by Wynkoop as well as by Anthony. Chivington responded that it was "right and honorable to use any means under God's heaven to kill Indians that would kill women and children, and 'damn any man that was in sympathy with Indians'. . . ."[12]

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[11]Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, pp. 292-93; Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre*, pp. 129-32; Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes*, pp. 214-15; West, *Contested Plains*, pp. 297-98; Josephy, *Civil War in the American West*, pp. 307-08.

[12]Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, pp. 293-94. (Quote is from testimony of Lieutenant Joseph A. Cramer, cited in ibid., p. 294); Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre*, pp. 135-43; Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, pp. 159-62. Discussion of the status of Black Kettle's people prior to Chivington's attack on them is in West, *Contested Plains*, pp. 298-300.

At around 8 p.m. on the 28th, Chivington led his column out of Fort Lyon paralleling an old Indian trail that headed northeast. Scarcely any snow lay on the ground. His command consisted of Shoup's Third Colorado Cavalry and about one-half of the First Colorado Cavalry divided under Major Anthony and First Lieutenant Luther Wilson, in all about 700 men bundled in heavy overcoats. Mules pulled along four howitzers and their ammunition and equipment. Some 37 miles away on the northeast side of Sand Creek stood Black Kettle's village of approximately 100 lodges housing about 500 people. Other Cheyenne leaders in the camp were Sand Hill, White Antelope, Bear Tongue, One Eye, and War Bonnet. Also here were approximately eight Arapaho lodges with Left Hand. Although some men were present, many had gone hunting, leaving mostly women, children, and the elderly in the village. Through the night of November 28-29, all were oblivious to the closing proximity of the soldiers.[13]

THE MASSACRE

Chivington's force kept a lively pace through the cold, moonless night, so that the first streaks of dawn on November 29 revealed the white tipis of the Cheyennes and Arapahos a few miles off to the northwest. Advancing closer, the soldiers gained a ridge overlooking Sand Creek from which they could clearly discern the camp. Pony herds ranged on either side of the stream, and Chivington dispatched units to capture and corral the animals before the Indians might use them. As the tribesmen slowly awakened, the troops descended into the dry streambed and moved northwest along it with the howitzers in tow. While troops of the First Colorado rode ahead, Chivington halted the men of the Third about one-half mile from the village so that they could remove their overcoats and other luggage. He exhorted them at the prospect before them, then sent them forward toward the camp, whose occupants had gradually become aroused at the noise of the approaching threat. Nearing the lower end of the village, the soldiers deployed their force and opened fire. As the startled Indians ran out of their homes, howitzers hurled exploding shells that turned the people away to congregate near the westernmost lodges while their leaders tried to communicate with the attackers. Then shooting erupted everywhere. The leader White Antelope ran forward, arms raised and waving for attention, but a soldier bullet cut him down. Black Kettle, proponent for peace and guardian of his people, reportedly raised an American flag and a white flag on a pole near his lodge to announce his status, but it was ignored in the heat of the onslaught.

Chivington's command continued the small arms fire from positions northeast and southeast of the camp. Caught in a crossfire, the warriors responded by attempting to shield the women, children, and elderly who ran to the back of the lodges. Most of the howitzer rounds fell short of their mark, although some burst over the village. As the soldiers advanced on horseback along either side of the creek, they kept up their shooting, and those on the north (east) bank of the stream passed through the fringe of

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[13]The locations of the Cheyenne camp components are laid out according to George Bent in George E. Hyde, *Life of George Bent written from His Letters, e*d. Savoie Lottinville (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), p. 149. See also, Peter John Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain: A History of the Northern Cheyenne Chiefs and Warrior Societies, 1830-1879, with an Epilogue, 1969-1974* (2 vols.; San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1981), I, pp. 299-300.

the camp. The mass of people began to flee in all directions for safety. Many ran into and up the creek bottom, which appeared to afford a natural protective corridor leading away from the assault. Riding on either side of the Indians, however, the cavalry troops indiscriminately fired hundreds of rounds into the fleeing tribesmen, and began to inflict large numbers of casualties among them. Meantime, other Indians bolting the village at the opening of the attack had managed to obtain horses and were running generally north and southwest over the open terrain as they tried to elude squads of pursuing cavalrymen. Many of them were chased down and killed by the flying troops.

But it was the mass of people in the streambed that drew the attention of most of the soldiers. As they reached a point several hundred yards above the village, these people – composed mostly of noncombatants – sought to find shelter in hastily dug pits and trenches in the creek bed, most excavated by hand at the base of the dry stream banks. The Sand Creek bottom was several hundred yards wide at this point, and the people sought shelter along either bank, digging hiding places and throwing the sand and dirt outward to form protective barriers. Having pursued the Cheyennes and Arapahos to this location, the troops dismounted on either side of the stream and approached cautiously. Some began firing at Indians sheltered in the pits beneath the opposite banks, while others crawled forward and discharged their weapons blindly over the top of the bank. Thus trapped, the Indian people fought back desperately with what few weapons they possessed. Shortly, however, the howitzers arrived from downstream, took positions on either side of the Sand Creek bottom, and began delivering exploding shell into the pits. This bombardment, coupled with the steady fire of the cavalry small arms, was too much for the people, and by the time the affair was over at around 2 p.m., at least 150 Cheyennes and Arapahos lay dead, most of them killed during the slaughter in the defensive pits above the village or in the stream bed as they ran from the camp to elude the soldiers. Chivington lost ten men killed and thirty-eight wounded in the encounter. Throughout the balance of the day, parties of cavalrymen roamed the area for miles around finishing off any survivors they could find. That night, nonetheless, many of those wounded during the carnage managed to get away from the pits and join other village escapees who, over the next several days, journeyed northeast to the Cheyenne camps along the Smoky Hill River. Surprisingly, despite the suddenness and ferocity of the Sand Creek assault, the majority of villagers, including many who were severely wounded, somehow escaped the soldiers and survived.

Those who did not survive became the objects of widespread mutilation at the hands of the soldiers, particularly of members of the “Bloodless Third.” Over the next day, these largely untrained and undisciplined troops, including some officers, roamed the site of the destruction scalping and otherwise desecrating the dead, thereby compounding the basic butchery of the event. The soldiers then plundered and burned the village and destroyed its contents. The captured pony herd traveled south with Chivington as he continued his campaign, and the dead and wounded soldiers were removed to Fort Lyon. Chivington had earlier planned to mete similar treatment upon the Smoky Hill assemblage, but instead turned toward the Arapaho village that Major Anthony had earlier sent away from Fort Lyon. These tribesmen had fled by the time the troops followed Sand Creek to its mouth on the Arkansas River. The Third Colorado then moved upstream to Fort Lyon before heading back to Denver, where they were greeted on December 22 by a throng of cheering citizens ecstatic over the “victory” of Sand Creek. Scalps from the Indian victims were ceremoniously exhibited at a local theater as the soldiers recounted their participation. As if the true number of deaths were not

enough, Chivington boasted of having killed between 500 and 600 Indians in his attack.[14]

OUTCRY AND AFTERMATH

In the aftermath of Sand Creek, as word gradually spread about the brutality of the onslaught, questions arose about Chivington's version of events. The truth shocked and sickened most Americans. In 1865, Sand Creek became the focus of three federal investigations, one military and the others congressional, looking into justification for, and details of, the action. Senator James R. Doolittle (R-Wisconsin), chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, directed an inquiry following receipt of information about the event that "made one's blood chill and freeze with horror." In the West, General Curtis was ordered to find out what had occurred at Sand Creek. The examinations resolved that Chivington and his troops had conducted a premeditated campaign that resulted in the needless massacre of the Cheyennes and Arapahos, and that the atrocities that followed were an abject disgrace. By then, however, the colonel and his men were out of the service and could not be prosecuted for their actions, and only Chivington's political future suffered. The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War concluded in its assessment of Chivington that "he deliberately planned and executed a foul and dastardly massacre which would have disgraced the veriest savage among those who were the victims of his cruelty." The committee also resolved that Governor Evans "was fully aware that the Indians massacred so brutally at Sand Creek, were then, and had been, actuated by the most friendly feelings towards the whites. . . ."[15] Ultimately, Evans paid the price for his involvement in events preliminary to the massacre and was dismissed as governor. In time, the Cheyenne and Arapaho victims of Sand Creek received scant restitution through the Treaty of the Little Arkansas,

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[14]This account of Sand Creek is based upon information in Roberts, "Sand Creek," pp. 421-41; Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre*, pp. 145-62; Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, pp. 295-96; Josephy, *Civil War in the American West*, pp. 308-11; Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain*, I, 301-09; Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, pp. 151-56; Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, pp. Pp. 163-73; and Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes*, pp. 217-22. Chivington's figure is in his report of December 16, 1864, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (73 vols., 128 parts; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. XLI, Part I, 949.

[15]Josephy, *Civil War in the American West*, pp. 311-12 (including first quote); Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, pp. 297 (second quote), 309; Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre*, pp. 163-76 (including third quote, p. 166); Roberts, "Sand Creek," pp. 479-521. The three published products of these investigations are: U.S. Senate, 38 Cong., 2 sess. *Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, Massacre of the Cheyenne Indians*. Report No. 142 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1865); U.S. Senate, 39 Cong., 2 sess., *Report of the Joint Special Committee. Condition of the Indian Tribes with Appendix (The Chivington Massacre)*. Report No. 156 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1867); and U.S. Senate. 39 Cong., 2 sess. *Report of the Secretary of War, Communicating . . . a Copy of the Evidence Taken at Denver and Fort Lyon, Colorado Territory by a Military Commission Ordered to Inquire into the Sand Creek Massacre, November 29, 1864*. Executive Document No. 26 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1867).

concluded in 1865, which purported to compensate them for suffering and property losses, a provision as yet unfulfilled. The treaty repudiated Chivington's massacre and promised to bestow lands on chiefs and survivors of Sand Creek whose parents or husbands had fallen at Chivington's hands, as well as redress for white citizens who had been impacted by the warfare.[16]

[16]Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes*, pp. 240-44; Roberts, "Sand Creek," pp. 510, 562-66.